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RUEHMS/AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY 0252

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 001085

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN MFA ASSESSMENT OF THE DOHA AGREEMENT FOR  
LEBANON

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Stuart Jones  
Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Egyptian MFA reaction to the May 20 Lebanese National Dialogue agreement in Doha was positive, and our MFA interlocutors praised Qatar's role. All agreed that the Doha agreement was the best that could have been expected. That said, there are competing internal MFA analyses on what the recent Lebanon crisis means for Egyptian regional policy, especially as it relates to the Iranian/Syrian nexus. End summary.

¶2. (C) Our key MFA interlocutors on Syria/Lebanon uniformly praised the Doha agreement, and the efforts of Qatari PM and FM Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim and Arab League Secretary General Moussa. Deputy Assistant Minister for Arab Affairs Ayman Zeineldeen assessed that, based on the way the latest crisis in Lebanon had played out, this was the best that could have been hoped for. There is finally a chance for the Lebanese to move forward, he said. Commenting on the opposition's securing of a "blocking third" in the Lebanese cabinet, Zeineldeen opined that "having a blocking third in the cabinet is better than having a militia blocking the street, and we are sober about this reality."

¶3. (C) Both Zeineldeen and MFA Cabinet Advisor for Syria/Lebanon Nazih Neggary believe that the Lebanese majority is "well protected" by virtue of holding an actual majority of cabinet seats (16). Both assessed that the language on internal use of force was sufficient. Neggary thought that the Elections Law was "a draw" and that the political parties would all have enough time to maneuver and gain (or lose) an advantage in the year running up to the May 2009 parliamentary elections. He expressed concern that Iran has already started to provide financial assistance to favorable candidates.

¶4. (C) Neggary, who had been dispatched by FM Aboul Gheit at the last minute to observe to Doha talks, opined that Arabs had come to the realization that Hizballah, with Iran's backing, had "taken over an Arab capital." He claimed that Qatari PM/FM Hamad bin Jassim and Arab League Chief of Staff Hisham Yousef, normally sympathetic to Syria, took a tough line with the Lebanese opposition. Omani FM Yousef bin Allawi, also considered to be supportive of Syria, was reportedly "furious" with Hizballah. Neggary offered his conclusion that the Omanis and Qataris may be realizing that what happened in Lebanon could eventually happen to them as well.

¶5. (SBU) At an Arab League briefing of local diplomats May 24, Yousef assessed that the Doha compromise had produced a return to the "status quo ante." He was pleased that the Lebanese had negotiated a solution and that there had been an "Arab solution to an Arab problem." He noted to the group

that both the USG and Iran had welcomed the agreement. Yousef was realistic of the challenges that lay ahead, and said that formation of the National Unity Government and the selection of ministers will likely create serious intra-party competition. He opined that the security dialogue, which will go ahead under President Sleiman, is perhaps the biggest challenge, and the Arab League will help to advance this process. Detailed negotiations on the electoral law and ensuring transparent 2009 parliamentary elections also will require close attention.

¶16. (C) Comment. Although FM Aboul Gheit routinely uses strong rhetoric in discussions with us about the dangers of Hizballah and Iranian influence in Lebanon, the MFA does not have a counter-strategy. The MFA (and other GOE foreign policy actors) are still formulating next steps.  
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